

called Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

The Palestinians were given a unique and exceptional opportunity 3 years ago at Camp David when Israel offered nearly all the land in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, control of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and billions of dollars guaranteed to build an infrastructure and a new Palestinian state in exchange for two simple things: peace and an end to terrorism.

□ 1015

Arafat was in a unique historical position to finally bring peace. Instead, Arafat chose violence rather than compromises, terrorism rather than harmony. He chose to embrace cowardice and fear rather than to lead the Palestinians on the path to peace and statehood.

The United States and Israel stand together in a worldwide struggle against terrorism. However, instead of standing decisively with our strongest ally, the only democracy in the Middle East, we continue to threaten our level of aid, subjecting Israel to a quid pro quo better befitting an adolescent child than a sovereign nation. I speak of Israel's need for a security fence in order to protect its citizens against continued terrorist attacks. Let us not deduct the cost of the fence from our loan guarantees.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

(Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month and to honor all of the contributions of the Latino community in the United States.

Right now, the Latino community is the largest minority group in America, with over 37 million people. We continue to become more powerful and a more dominant force in the United States. In fact, this year, we will have a purchasing power within the Latino community reaching almost \$600 billion. Marketers and advertisers, CEOs and companies are realizing that we are a target for consuming, and we are becoming the fastest growing consumer sector in this Nation.

Our increasing power and influence in this country cannot be ignored. So this week, so many Latino groups are in town preparing an agenda for the future, and a good Hispanic agenda is a good agenda for America.

WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2555, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up

House Resolution 374 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 374

Resolved, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 2555) making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived. The conference report shall be considered as read.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN). The gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

(Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 374 is a rule that provides for the consideration of the conference report for the fiscal year 2004 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act. This is a standard rule for a conference report, providing for 1 hour of general debate, evenly divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations.

As we continue the 2004 appropriations cycle, Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that the first appropriations bill, and now the first conference report this House considers, is the Homeland Security Appropriations Act. It has been over 2 years since the Nation was savagely attacked by a group of cowardly terrorists on September 11, 2001. Appropriate, decisive, and necessary steps in our defense and foreign policy have been evident under the leadership of President Bush through successful efforts to eliminate al Qaeda from its government-sponsored haven of Afghanistan, the elimination of the Taliban regime and, recently, to remove the ruthless dictator Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and operations throughout the world in furtherance of U.S. national security.

The U.S. military has performed and succeeded with distinction each and every time we have called upon their gallant services. But much more work has to be accomplished in the homeland; and this legislation, Mr. Speaker, provides communities the necessary tools to effect necessary security efforts.

In this conference report, Congress is providing almost \$30 billion to protect the homeland, \$1 billion above the President's request.

The legislation provides \$4.2 billion to the Office of Domestic Preparedness.

I have seen firsthand the work of Federal dollars when supplemented with State and local funding to make our communities safe. In south Florida, the local governments and municipalities have taken extensive steps to ensure the safety of airports, seaports, utilities, and water supplies; but they still require the supplemental funding and grants that this legislation provides. With over 7,500 miles of land borders and 361 seaports, local authorities will always be the frontline of defense.

First responders are the key to the effective protection of our communities. In addition to many other programs, this conference report provides \$1.7 billion for basic formula grants under the Office of Domestic Preparedness; \$500 million for State and local enforcement terrorism prevention grants; \$750 million for firefighter grants, and \$725 million for high-threat, high-density urban areas.

To further ensure the safety of the American people, we have instituted very clear guidelines for grant eligibility. Local and State officials must create a multiyear homeland security plan. This will ensure that we are not just throwing money at the problem, but we are working to find comprehensive, long-term solutions to problems.

The Department of Homeland Security is also working hard to protect our ports of entry. There is \$62 million in this bill for the Container Security Initiative. It is our belief that security at our ports should be the last line of defense, not a first.

Through the Container Security Initiative, the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection is working with the world's largest ports to screen cargo before it leaves for the United States. We now require 24-hour advanced notice for manifests of any cargo ship heading to the United States. This allows the Department of Homeland Security to see what is on a ship before it gets anywhere near the coasts of the United States. Through a sophisticated database screening system and ground personnel working with host countries, the Department is creating a frontline of defense hundreds, sometimes even thousands of miles away.

This conference report also provides \$236 million for immigration services, \$80 million of which is dedicated to alleviating the current unsatisfactory backlog of immigration applications. Under President Bush's Blueprint for New Beginnings, Director Aduardo Aguirre of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is committed to achieving a maximum term of 6 months for immigration applications between the time of application and the time of swearing in, including for citizenship, specifically. Some parts of our Nation have seen the wait for citizenship applications grow and grow to the point that now it is not anywhere near 6 months, but rather years, in many instances. Effective funding to eliminate this backlog and streamline the process is essential, as is congressional oversight; and I want to thank